DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 296 123 CE 050 406

AUTHOR	Kerka, Sandra
TITLE	Single Parents: Career-Related Issues and Needs. ERIC Digest No. 75.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	88
CONTRACT	RI88062005
NOTE	3p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Career Development; *Career Education; Displaced Homemakers; Dropout Prevention; Early Parenthood; *Educational Needs; Fathers; Federal Legislation; Federal Programs; Information Dissemination; Information Networks; *One Parent Family; Public Policy
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

One in every four families with children under the age of 18 is a single-parent family (up from 1 of every 10 in 1970). The vast majority of single-parent families are low-income families consisting of a mother (usually with relatively little formal education) and her young children. Many female single heads of households are either displaced homemakers or adolescent mothers. Although they generally have a more healthy economic status than their female counterparts, single fathers are often confronted with serious career-related problems as they find their sole child-rearing role conflicting with work expectations. As the sole support of their families, single parents are concerned with obtaining a good job and achieving economic independence. However, job training and job placement can only be effective in the long run if program developers consider the other needs of single parents: emotional support, job-seeking skills, basic skills instruction, outreach and recruitment, child care, self-concept building, skills assessment, nontraditional job skills, and parenthood education. High school dropout prevention programs are also important for adolescent single parents. Difficulties in locating available resources often prevent single parents from learning of career and other services. Support and referral networks and newsletters are an inexpensive and effective strategy for communicating with, educating, and supporting all categories of single parents. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED296123

ERIC DIGEST No. 75

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

SINGLE PARENTS: CAREER-RELATED ISSUES AND NEEDS

Today, 1 of every 4 families with children under the age of 18 is a single-parent family, up from 1 of every 10 in 1970. Nearly 60 percent of all children born in 1986 may spend 1 year or longer in a single-parent family before reaching age 18 (Norton and Glick 1986). Clearly a growing phenomenon, the single-parent family is often subject to extreme economic problems; single parents need special assistance with career development and vocational preparation. This ***ERIC Digest*** explores the nature of single parenthood and the special preemployment and employment needs of distinct types of single-parent families, highlighting the characteristics of effective career development programs to meet those needs.

Nature of Single Parenthood

Single parents commonly experience difficulties with role identity. Some social stigma is still attached to single-parent status, regardless of how it was acquired. For single mothers, development of a positive identity is often hampered by their inability to support their families financially. Single parents often experience role strain from attempting to balance wage earner and parental responsibilities.

Lack of formal education and consequently of job skills limits access to occupations that provide enough income for an acceptable standard of living. Women are additionally hindered by socialization into traditionally female occupations that are low paying, perpetuating the cycle of poverty (Burge 1987).

Poverty is persistently linked with single-parent households, especially those headed by women. Such families are the poorest of all major demographic groups in the United States (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986). Wage differences between men and women, arising from lack of labor market preparation or experience or from discrimination, reinforce low-income status.

Although child care is an issue for all parents, an overwhelming number of single parents cannot afford high-quality day care, a major barrier to attending career development and skills training programs as well as to maintaining employment.

Among the solutions to these problems are changes in public policy and public attitudes toward single-parent families and more adequate financial support and child-care systems. Another key is career development; in addition to employment and economic security, career education can improve the physical and emotional well-being of participants (Burge 1987).

Types of Single Parents

The vast majority of single-parent families are low income families consisting of a mother and her young children, characterized by a high percentage of minority representation and relatively little formal education. Three major subgroups of one-parent families have also been identified: displaced homemakers, adolescent mothers, and single fathers (Burge 1987).

CE050406

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Displaced Homemakers

Marital dissolution drastically reduces the new single-parent family's available income. Displaced homemakers are at an additional disadvantage because they often have little or no employment history, obsolete training or skills, low self-esteem, and external locus of control.

Adolescent Mothers

Each year in America, 1 in 10 teenage girls becomes pregnant. This vast subgroup of single parents faces many obstacles to self-sufficiency, such as lack of education, job readiness, and emotional maturity. Their crucial need to complete education and achieve employment goals is complicated by their immediate needs for food, housing, child care, and emotional support (***Time for Transition*** 1985).

Single Fathers

Although they generally have a more healthy economic status than their female counterparts, single fathers often find their sole child-rearing role conflicting with work expectations. They also find themselves filling social roles for which they are not prepared.

Career Development Needs of Single Parents

As the sole support of their families, single parents are concerned with obtaining a good job and achieving economic independence. However, job training and job placement can be effective in the long run only if other needs are also addressed. Program developers should consider the following aspects:

- Emotional support (counseling, peer groups, assistance with developing support systems)
- Job-seeking skills
- Basic skills instruction (especially literacy skills)
- Outreach and recruitment
- Child care
- Analysis of the role of gender in occupational choice
- Self-concept building
- Skills assessment
- The challenges of combining work and family roles
- Nontraditional job skills
- Parenthood education

Career Development Programs

Meeting the needs of the many types of one-parent families is a major social challenge. Program developers must offer a full range of services, from occupational exploration to job search assistance. Following are some examples of types of career development programs for single parents (Burge 1987).

High School Dropout Prevention Programs

Pregnant teens and teen parents are special targets for dropout prevention. Effective programs should include basic academic skills as well as occupational preparation, accurate information and guidance related to sexuality and family planning, prenatal, and family life instruction, and support networks of teachers and peers who can assist with low self-esteem, time and stress management, and long- and short-term goal setting. Pregnant teens and teen parents can participate in alternative high school programs or be mainstreamed in regular classrooms.

Established Education Sites

Many single parents may feel more comfortable in the adult education atmosphere provided in area vocational centers and community colleges. Such established sites already offer such services as basic literacy instruction, personal and career counseling, assistance for reentry students, and job placement. Child-care centers at these sites would overcome one of the major barriers for single parents returning to school.

Networks and Newsletters

Single parents frequently do not use the resources available to them, due to the extensive time and effort needed to locate them or to discouraging past experiences (***Time for Transition*** 1985). Support and referral networks can help them identify the community agencies that offer assistance with legal problems, health care, emergency funds, housing, shelter and projection, substance abuse, and other matters. Such networks can also provide advice on determining eligibility, meeting requirements, and negotiating for services with these agencies.

Newsletters are an inexpensive strategy for communicating with, educating, and supporting single parents. They can be used to supplement group or individual career development activities. Work, homemaking, and child care demands often cause problems with attendance at formal programs, making newsletters an effective outreach technique.

Federally Funded Programs

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act emphasizes support of increased vocational education opportunities for displaced homemakers and single parents, among other groups. Many sites in Florida have used Perkins Act funding for projects ranging from balancing family life, education, and employment to increasing awareness of nontraditional careers, achieving business ownership, and assisting with day care and sick child care. (The ERIC database contains descriptions of many Florida programs—see ED 285 039-049 and ED 285 988-999.)

Title II-A of the Job Training Partnership Act provides assistance to persons who have experienced barriers to employment, including displaced homemakers, single heads of households, and teenage parents. Funding for support services can be used for child care to increase participation. In addition, the 6 percent set-aside provides incentive grants for serving the special needs of these groups.

Policy Concerns

In addition to developing effective programs, career educators can be advocates for public policy designed to assist single parents. Policy changes are needed in the areas of employment discrimination, recognition of nontraditional roles, government and employer support of child care, pay equity, social services for potential teen single parents, and work environment alternatives. In short, policies that establish an equitable educational and economic climate for both sexes and all ethnic groups as well as recognition of single-parent families as a viable family form will benefit not only these families but society as a whole.

REFERENCES

This ***ERIC Digest*** is based on the following publication:

Burge, Penny L. ***Career Development of Single Parents.*** Information Series no. 324. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1987. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 290 934)

Additional References

Garfinkel, Irwin, and McLanahan, Sara S. ***Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma.*** Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 1986.

Norton, A. J., and Glick, P. C. "One-Parent Families: A Social and Economic Profile." ***Family Relations*** 35, no. 1 (January 1986): 9-17. (ERIC No. EJ 332 628)

Time for Transition. Teenage Parents and Employment. New York, NY: National Child Labor Committee, 1985. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 282 096)

This ***ERIC Digest*** was developed in 1988 by Sandra Kerka, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. RI88062005. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education. Orders for National Center Publications should be sent to the Publications Office, Box E, or call (614) 486-3655 or (800) 848-4815.

ERIC is sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1960 KENNY ROAD · COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210